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THE WHITEWINGED TIT Parus nuchalis IN SOUTHERN  
INDIA AND NOTES ON THE GREAT TIT Parus major.

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"I obtained this well marked species of tit from the Eastern Ghats West of Nellore. The shikarees who brought it to me said that it was rare. It has since been obtained by Dr Stewart from a tope of trees near Bangalore...."

T. C. Jerdon

On a recent trip to Vishakapatnam, I looked out for this species in and around the city, in the zoo premises, Simhachalam (which has the habitat described by Stuart Baker- Tops of wooded hills.) and also from the train (which moved at a pace that only a birdwatcher could appreciate) but it was all in vain. I have found only two recent reports of this Tit in Southern India, both from the Kaveri valley 100 Km South of Bangalore, where too I have failed to see it. Interestingly all specimens of the Whitewinged Tit in the BNHS are from Kutch, Western India. It appears that this Tit is much rarer than suggested by 'Jerdon's Shikarees'. The Whitewinged tit

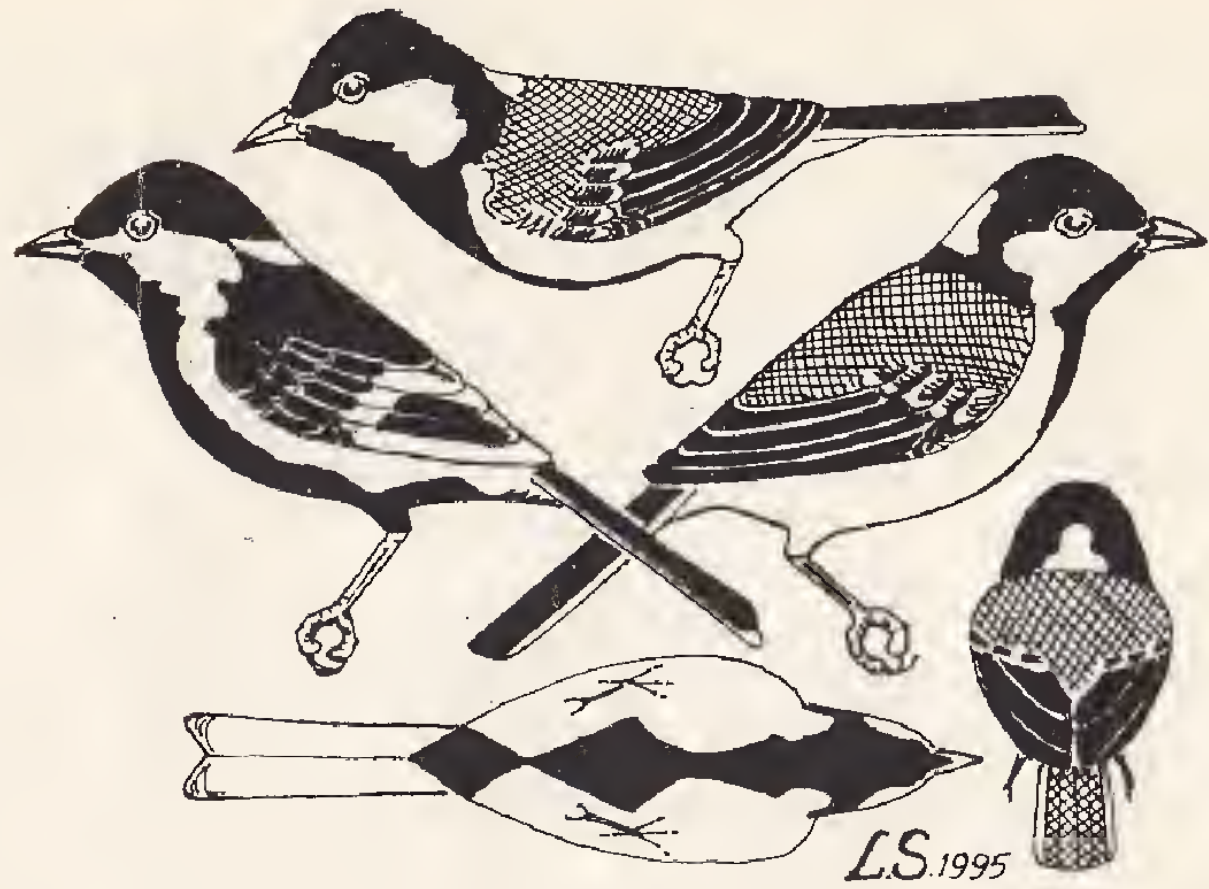
sketch is of a Kutch specimen in the BNHS. It is to be seen if 1000 kilometres of separation has led to any visible differences. Some of the specimens show some buff on the flanks, which I was told was due to ageing. Salim Ali in his Birds of Gujarat states that breeding males carry much yellow on the flanks.

Great Tits Parus major show a lot of variation in the amount of black. The top sketch is from a newsletter coverphoto (Vol. 32, 9-10) of a breeding adult with a white vent. The underside view is of an adult, which was displaying, with a completely black vent (undertail coverts). The Great Tit facing right is an immature which had a rounded tail, incomplete 'chin-strap' and a curiously shaped white patch on the nape. Adult Great Tits also have a white nape which should not be confused with the nuchal patch of Parus nuchalis which I found to be smaller than shown in most illustrations.

REFERENCES

- Anon. (1994), Annotated checklist of the birds of Bangalore. p.57  
Baker, E. C. S. (1922), Fauna of British India; Birds. Vol. II: p.79  
Jerdon, T. C. (1863), The birds of India. Vol. II part I: p.279  
Lott, E. J. (1987), NLBW, 29(9-10): p.16

Salim Ali's Mysore Survey  
2 - specimens collected in BR Hills



M.K. Himmatsinnji

Jubilee Ground  
Bhuj, Kutch  
March 11, 1992

Dear Mr. Shyamal

h (in your sketch)

With reference to your letter of the 7th on the colours, status and so on of Parus nuchalis, it is a long time since I came across this bird in Kutch. Your sketch of it from the specimen of the bird in the BNHS is good, but it differs from the birds commonly seen here and from the photo as well as the picture in the coloured plate published in the Birds Of Kutch. There is more black depicted on the sides and underside with the nuchal patch less prominently white. The primaries and secondaries in the birds in Kutch have more white than shown in your sketch.

h sites

As far as the status of this species is concerned, it is no more seen in some of the areas it used to frequent previously. In fact it is one of our endangered endemic species now. The threat to its existence comes mainly through habitat destruction by wanton felling of trees in which it nests and lives. Its co-existence with Picoides maharattensis (Yellowfronted Pied or Maharashtra Woodpecker) mostly in Kutch and parts of Rajasthan is well known to ornithologists and birdwatchers in general. So the habitat destruction would affect the latter species also. The Whitewinged Black Tit cannot obviously excavate its own nest-hole, but uses old nests of woodpeckers for its nidification. I need not comment on the present status of the bird as it is already mentioned by Hussain, Akhtar and Tiwari in their article mentioned by you already.

Apart from habitat destruction, wherever P. nuchalis lives near cultivated areas it faces the danger of imbibing poisonous pesticides through its insect food as these are widely used by farmers these days.

I am not sending my above comments to the Newsletter, but you may do so if you think they are worthwhile. Please do not hesitate to send me queries on any subject other than the above whenever you feel like it.

Yours sincerely  
Himmatsinnji